

A Proposal to Reform the United States Congress

This package of reforms will establish or enhance House rules and policies to improve accountability and transparency in the United States Congress. This set of priorities will ensure Members of Congress operate in the best interest of the American people and hold them to strict

Make Earmarks More Transparent

Currently House rules require Members of Congress to disclose earmark requests on their websites, but many times that information is purposefully buried on a hidden webpage or simply difficult to find. This change would require all earmark requests to be accessible through a clearly labeled link on the requester's front page of their website.

Make Members' Expenses More Transparent and Return Any Unused Funds

In the past, Members were under no requirement to return unused portions of their office operational allowances. This change would require any funds remaining at the end of a fiscal year to be deposited in the Treasury and used for deficit reduction (PASSED 3/17/10), and make yearly expenses more easily accessible online.

Improve Ethics Investigations

Currently, the Ethics Committee is under no requirement to report the findings of an investigation by a time certain, unnecessarily drawing out the length of investigations and undermining public faith in the ability of Congress to police itself. This change would amend the House rules to require preliminary reports from ethics investigations to be issued to the Speaker's office and Minority Leader's office within 90 days of commencement. In addition, due to concerns that Congressional staff often feel that they are without recourse when subject to harassment by their superiors, this change would designate a "Congressional Staff Liaison" within the Ethics Committee to handle complaints or concerns from Congressional staff.

Improve Public Access to Vital Information

Currently many government documents affecting issues of critical public importance are difficult or impossible for the public to track down and monitor. This change would require federal government agencies to write public documents like tax returns, federal college aid applications, web sites, and Veterans Administration forms in simple, easy-to-understand language. (PASSED 3/17/10)

Reform Congressional Travel

Previously, an unclear reimbursement process created the risk of taxpayer money being used for Members' personal, non-public expenses. This change, already adopted in part, would clarify the House rules to require timely and full accounting of amounts received for travel-related per diems over and above actual expenses, bringing Congress in line with travel expense protocols observed by all other federal employees.

Minimize Conflicts of Interest & Close The Revolving Door

Currently, no rule bars the leaders of committees from soliciting testimony from witnesses in whom those individuals have a direct financial interest. This change would require chairs and ranking members of committees to disclose if they have financial interest in the witnesses appearing before their committee. In addition, to help close the “revolving door” between Congress and the private sector, this change would amend the House rules to prohibit a member from negotiating or accepting a job involving lobbying activity until after his or her successor has been elected, or until the member has left the House.

Allow Stricter State Ethics Reforms

Many states have enacted “anti-pay-to-play laws” which restrict major campaign contributors from bidding on government contracts, but the Federal Highway Administration has undermined these efforts by prohibiting federal highway funds to these states. This change would protect state anti-pay-to-play laws by fixing the law which prohibits the FHA from disbursing these funds to states that limit who can bid on contracts based on political contributions.

Enact a Voluntary Small Donor Campaign Funding System

At the core of our drive to reform Congress is improving the electoral process in which the role of money has played an outsized role. With this in mind, passage of the Fair Elections Now Act is essential. This bill would offer Congressional candidates the option to qualify for a limited public grant by collecting a set number of small contributions from constituents, modeled on successful statewide programs in Connecticut, Arizona, and Maine.

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